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ABSTRACT

This conference synopsis presents the views of educators, researchers, and a journalist who maintain that inner city schools are effective, and can be more so, in educating disadvantaged students. The claim that inner city schools cannot overcome deficits in family background unless students' socioeconomic position is first improved is challenged. The key to success, the researchers assert, lies not in socioeconomic background, but in identifiable school oriented factors, including: (1) authoritative leadership; (2) climate of orderliness; (3) positive teacher expectations; (4) a basics oriented curriculum; and (5) periodic assessment of student progress. Two scholars (Ronald Edmonds and Peter Mortimore) whose research supports this conclusion offer summaries of their work in British and American schools. In addition, a reporter (Robert Benjamin) presents some of his observations of successful schools in U.S. inner cities. The authors also provide suggestions for increasing the effectiveness of urban schools. (APM)

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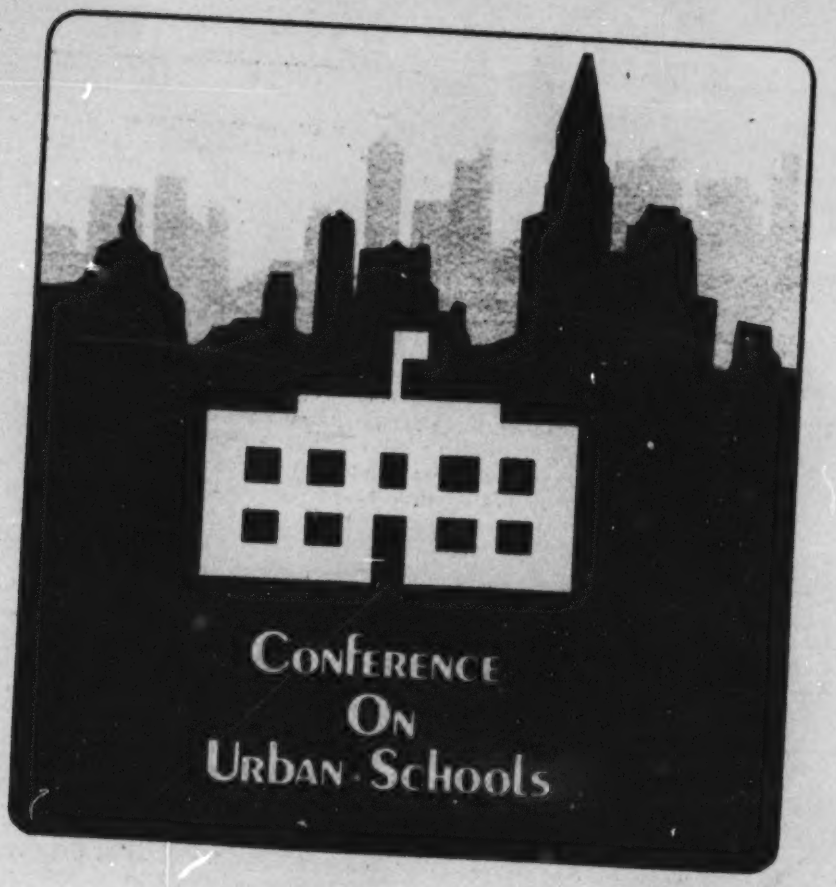

THE COUNCIL FOR BASIC EDUCATION

REPORT OF THE CONFERENCE ON URBAN SCHOOLS

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"Schools bring little influence to bear on a child's achievement that is independent of his background and general social context." James Coleman, from an article by Edward B. Fiske, *New York Times*, 12/26/79

"Schools can no longer use students' disadvantaged background as an excuse for not teaching them the fundamentals." Ronald Edmonds, from an article by Edward B. Fiske, *New York Times*, 12/26/79

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PETER MORTIMORE

Dr. Peter Mortimore is Director of the Research and Statistics Group of the Inner London Education Authority. He was a member of the research team that produced *Fifteen Thousand Hours*, a study of 12 secondary schools in poor neighborhoods in London. Dr. Mortimore previously served as a researcher with the Institute of Psychiatry at the University of London, and as a teacher in London's secondary schools. He is an educational psychologist who holds a Ph.D. from the University of London.

GWENDOLYN THOMAS

As a Facilitator for the School Improvement Project of the New York City Board of Education, Gwendolyn Thomas acts as a liaison between the project administrators and individual school personnel. Ms. Thomas has also served with the Board of Education as a mathematics instruction coordinator and specialist, a teacher trainer-administrator, and an elementary and secondary classroom instructor. Ms. Thomas holds a B.A. from Hunter College, New York, an M.S. in Education and a Professorial Diploma in Educational Administration and Supervision from City College in New York.

COUNCIL FOR BASIC EDUCATION

REPORT ON THE

CONFERENCE ON URBAN SCHOOLS

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I. INTRODUCTION

With generous support from the Hazen Foundation, the Council for Basic Education sponsored a conference on urban schools in Washington, D.C. on October 31, 1980. The objective was to promote urban school improvement by increasing the public's knowledge of what makes an effective school, by identifying the obstacles to effectiveness, and by explaining ways they might be overcome.

II. BACKGROUND

The plight of the urban public school has been much discussed, and the conclusions are usually gloomy. Cities, says Alison Wolf, have abnormally high proportions of low achievers who are often further concentrated in low-achieving schools. The typical urban school (defined here as one in which students are predominantly from families below the federally-determined poverty level in population centers of more than 50,000) is disorderly and prone to vandalism and violence; parental participation is negligible; student and teacher absenteeism and apathy, on the other hand, are commonplace. As Daniel Levine points out:

> Overloaded with too many students who themselves are overloaded with a multitude of individual and family problems, the public schools as traditionally organized and operated sometimes then may all but cease functioning educationally at all, becoming little more than custodial institutions in which students and teachers expect little and achieve less.

As a result, few students who are products of urban public schools can compete successfully in an increasingly specialized job market. Thus, although young people are the obvious victims of inferior schools, employers and other citizens are acutely affected by the absence of sound education in city schools. Broadly speaking, America's policital and economic vitality is threatened by our troubled urban schools.

This bleak picture is worsened by research results that gave rise to the popular notion that nothing could or should be done to improve urban schools because family background and social environment overwhelm school influences.

Most often cited is the Equal Educational Opportunity Survey. Completed under James Coleman's direction in 1966, it concluded: "Schools bring little influence to bear on a child's achievement that is independent of his background and general social content. The translation for Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Assistant to the President for Urban Affairs under Nixon and later Presidential Consultant, was a now infamous policy of "benign neglect." School improvement was pointless; only massive intervention in the lives of the poor might alleviate their "intrinsic disabilities."

The conclusions of Christopher Jencks' Inequality, a 1972 study of interactions among education, income, and social class, were similar to Coleman's, but more predictive: "There is no evidence that school reform can substantially reduce the extent of cognitive inequality. Nothing short of fundamental economic and social changes, it seemed, would moderate the disparities of American society.

In fact, the correlation of non-school factors to achievement in nearly all research of the past decade has helped sustain the assumption that schools can affect urban school children only slightly at best.

The Council for Basic Education does not accept the idea that urban schools are inevitably and irreparably inferior. To acknowledge that the urban environment presents substantial obstacles to be overcome is not to discredit urban school improvement. The Rand Corporation study of 1972, while admitting "non-school factors may well be more important determinants of educational outcomes than are school factors," reported: "None of this means that schools do not or cannot affect outcomes." Weak as this conclusion may appear in the context of massive problems, it bespeaks a shift toward greater optimism about the possiblities of improvement.

The success of urban school improvement should not be judged only on the extent to which cognitive inequality can be reduced. Of course children having middle-class backgrounds achieve, on average, at appreciably higher levels than those less fortunate: inequality, cognitive or otherwise, is currently a fact of life. Although urban schools should not assume full responsibility for this, neither should they default on the education of poor students. Says Ronald Edmonds, Senior Assistant for Instruction to New York City School Chancellor Frank Macchiarola: "Students from middle class homes, with lots of books and parents who read to them, will always have a step up on students from homes where this does not occur. But schools can no longer use students' disadvantaged backgrounds as an excuse for not teaching them the fundamentals." Edmonds deems schools "effective" if they "bring the children of the poor to those minimal masteries of basic school skills that now describe minimally successful pupil performance for the children of the middle class." This is a modest standard, to be sure, but one that establishes rational expectations for all public schools.

Edmonds, who is also a research associate at Harvard University, is in the forefront of a relatively new Effective School Movement. Led by Edmonds and fellow researchers Michael Rutter of the University of London, George Weber, formerly of CBE, and Richard Murnane of Yale, the movement aims to dispel the myth that inner city schools cannot overcome deficits in family background unless their socio-economic condition first improved. In separate studies, these scholars identified inner city schools that are effective in educating even the most disadvantaged students. The key to their success, the researchers have found, lies not in socio-economic background, but in certain, identifiable school-oriented factors: authoritative leadership, climate of orderliness, positive teacher expectations, a basics-oriented curriculum, periodic assessment of student progress.

There is plentiful research to support this claim:

-- George Weber, while Associate Director of the Council for Basic Education, first identified the key elements of effective urban schools. His 1971 study of beginning reading pinpointed strong leadership, high expectations, and a good atmosphere among other factors of success at four inner-city schools. "Their success," said Weber, "shows that the failure in beginning reading typical of inner-city schools is the fault not of the children or their background -- but of the schools."

-- Three years later, the New York State Office of Education performance Review paired a low-achieving and high-achieving schools serving similar groups of poor students. Success was attributed partly to instructionally motivated administrative leadership and teachers' faith in their own ability to affect learning. In short, performance, or the lack of it, seemed to be under the schools' control.

-- 21 pairs of elementary schools were matched in the 1976 study of school effectiveness in California by Madden, Lawson, and Sweet. Student background was similar for each pair; performance differed. Once again, academic support from the principal, a conducive learning atmosphere, high teacher expectation, and the application of appropriate principles of learning were cited as the important elements of the higher-achieving schools.

-- In 1977, using Michigan assessment figures for grades four and seven, Brookover and Lezotte found that differences at two declining and six improving schools in principals' styles, staff expectations, and educational goals and objectives accounted for how well the schools performed.

-- In the fall of 1979, Fifteen Thousand Hours, a study of 12 secondary schools conducted from 1970 to 1974 in poor London neighborhoods, was published in the United States. According to principal investigator Michael Rutter, "differences between schools in outcome were systematically related to their characteristics and these were open to modification by the staff, rather than fixed by external constraints." A partial list of characteristics includes high teacher expectation, a healthy learning environment, and strong academic emphasis. "We may conclude that the results carry the strong implication that schools can do much to foster good behavior and attainments," Rutter wrote, "and that even in a disadvantaged area, schools can be a force for the good."

Pilot projects are attempting to understand and replicate the "success factors" identified by the effective schools research. Edmonds admits that researchers feels a good deal less confident when they attempt to translate what they believe to be sound research conclusions into successful school programs. However, early reports, particularly from the New York City School Improvement Project, indicate positive results.

In summary, the plight of the urban school and the implications for

those it schools are well known. Much less well known, in part because previous research created the myth that schools produce negligible benefits for urban children, are studies which repeatedly show that schools can and do improve achievement levels of students when they embody certain qualities related to effectiveness. Discovering that effective urban schools exist is a milestone; further discovery of what makes a school effective is equally significant.

III. THE CONFERENCE - SYNOPSIS

The conference had the makings of a landmark event. When two prominent researchers affirm that all children can learn in urban schools; when two school practitioners act on that conviction; and when a well-informed journalist confirms it - together they can move audiences if not mountains.

Striking the keynote, Ronald Edmonds summarized the research he had begun in 1973, and expressed "enormous confidence" in the conclusions he and his colleagues have reached. Confronted by "dramatic achievement differences" among city schools, they concluded that every effective school - a school that "could demonstrate its ability to deliver basic school skills to the full range of the population" - had all these five characteristics: strong instructional leadership by the principal; a school-wide climate conducive to learning; school-wide emphasis on basic skills instruction; positive expectation of pupil achievement; regular measurement of pupil progress and constructive use of that measurement.

Peter Mortimore, a member of the research team that produced Fifteen Thousand Hours reviewed some of the corresponding studies that have been carried on in England, and made it plain that findings there correspond in many respects to findings here. Acknowledging that "schooling may not be able to compensate for society" and noting that "young people are subject to a variety of influences, from personal characteristics, home background, peers, and schools," Mortimore said, "Of these influences, however, only the school is easily changed."

Gwendolyn Thomas called herself a "change agent," and Maureen Larkin might have done the same. Both women are working in city schools to translate the findings of research into better schooling and education.

Larkin is from Milwaukee, where the Board of Education has given the schools three years to bring achievement up to national norms. The rock on which schools there are building school improvement is teacher expectation, and Larkin is director of the Milwaukee Teacher Expectation Project. Central to the Milwaukee endeavor - which comprehends all Edmonds's criteria - are seminars planned to help teachers understand the reasons for the relatively poor achievement of low-income and minority students, as well as the evidence supporting the assumption that their achievement need not be poor, and to learn ways to improve achievement.

Thomas is a "liaison" in New York City's school improvement project, undertaken in 1978 when Ronald Edmonds was appointed Chancellor Macchiarola's

chief instructional officer. She told the project's story to date, beginning with the "developmental probe" during the academic year 1978-79, when a kind of trial run served to refine data-gathering techniques and give project personnel experience. For the project's actual initiation in 1979-80, 10 elementary schools were selected from the city's 32 districts. In each school, liaisons worked with staff first to determine that school's needs for improvement, then to develop a plan. New liaisons and staff are working together to carry out the plans and monitor results. Thomas says she has "reached a peak of optimism."

Bringing to the conference the perspective of a veteran reporter and education writer, Robert Benjamin shared both the optimism of other speakers and their sensibility of difficulty in the face of the country's most conspicuous school problem. Now a writer for The Cincinnati Post, Benjamin has earned a number of awards for his distinguished newspaper work, and last year he was one of 10 reporters chosen for a Ford Foundation Fellowship in Educational Journalism.

IV. THE SPEECHES

"Urban Education: The Challenge and the Promise"

RONALD EDMONDS

I have been asked to talk about my efforts to translate the research that I have done into a program for school reform in the country's largest school system. So I am going to summarize in about five minutes the research that I represent. I have enormous confidence in the conclusions we reached. Then I am going to spend a good deal longer talking about something in which I have a good deal less confidence. That topic is "how do you translate what you believe to be sound research conclusions into a program whose intent is to modify the interaction between schools and the children in schools who ordinarily do not profit from the way we do things."

Let me summarize the research and then get on very quickly to what is being done about it. My colleagues and I at Harvard began in 1973 a national research project that collected income, social class and family background data on all children in grades 3 through 7 in a number of schools and school systems in various places throughout the United States. We followed our collection of income and social class data by collecting achievement data on the same children for all the years that they have been in school. We then analyzed the interaction between those data to the end that we wanted to find schools that had gone very far along the path of abolishing the traditional interaction between pupil performance and family background. We began with the premise that we would nominate a school as being effective if, and only if, it could demonstrate its ability to deliver basic school skills to the full range of its pupil population. The school populations we were studying had at least 16% poor as a portion of the school building and ranged all the way to 99.9% poor. We did succeed in finding numbers of elementary and intermediate schools that were consistently effective in their abilities to deliver basic school skills, to the full range of the pupil

population that they serve. That was the identification part of the work.

After that aspect of the work, we went to a second set of questions that interested us. Since these effective schools do exist, what is there about them that makes them that way, particularly when one compares them to other schools serving highly analogous pupil populations under highly similar institutional circumstances? We did sufficient controls to be certain that if we did identify institutional differences, it was those institutional, organizational characteristics that accounted for the difference. There was insufficient variation in the character of the pupil populations, the neighborhoods, or the circumstances under which the schools functioned to expalain away the dramatic achievement differences that we could consistently find across the city schools that we were studying.

We concluded that the explanation derived from only 5 institutional characteristics. Those five were the style of leadership in the building; the instructional emphasis in the building; the climate of the school; the implied expectations derived from the teacher's behavior in the classroom; and finally the presence, use, and response to standardized instruments for measuring pupil progress. Schools that have those five characteristics all together and all at once consistently represented the population of effective schools as contrasted to the population of ineffective schools.

I want to talk now about taking these conclusions out of the university and applying them to school systems. Since August of 1978, I have been the chief instructional officer of the New York City Public Schools. I was invited to New York by Chancellor Frank J. Macchiarola who gave me the assignment of applying the research findings I described to New York's basic approach to teaching and learning. The first thing I did when I went to the city was to articulate a pedagogical party line whose premises are fairly few.

First the New York City Public schools presume that all the children in school are educable. Premise two is that the educability of the children derives far more from the nature of the school to which they are sent than from the nature of the family from which they came. The third and perhaps most important premise is that pupil acquisition of basic school skills is not determined by family background. It is the school response to family background that determines pupil performace.

The topic I want to focus on now is my direct intervention in a cross-section of City schools by means of a project called the School Improvement Project.

Through this project I designed a program of intervention that is predicated exclusively on the school characteristics referred to a few moments ago. I have brought together a group of men and women in New York City who are called school liaison people. They have been trained in the import of the five school characteristics I mentioned and assigned

to the schools that are participating in the School Improvement Project. Their job is to guide the administrative and instructional personnel of the school through an evaluation of the school's relative strength and weakness with respect to each of the characteristics to which I referred. The outcome of that examination is what we call the Needs Assessment Document. The document has been prepared primarily by the liaison person but in close collaboration with a representative group of people who have been convened in each participating school.

Each document talks with some specificity about the relative strength and weakness of the instructional leadership in the building, the relative strength and weakness of the climate of the building and so on through all of the characteristics. I then use these documents as a basis for making the decisions about what kind of technical assistance would bring the school on line. Bear in mind that the premise from which all this proceeds is that any school that has obtained the five characteristics all at once would begin to show improvement in skills acquisition for precisely that portion of the pupil population that ordinarily profits least from the way we approach teaching and learning in city schools. For example, the needs assessment says if the principal in the building is found wanting in some aspect of instructional leadership, then I put to myself the question, "What can I do that would improve that principal's skills in the exercise of instructional leadership?" One of our very firm conclusions was that the principal of the school has to be the person to whom the instructional personnel look for instructional leadership. We know that one of the measures of instructional leadership is that the principal has to visit the classes, systematically observe, and respond to the observations. Therefore, if we discover that the principal just never does that, I would respond by assigning a person to work with the principal to teach what he or she might need to know in order to be a sophisticated and consistent evaluator of teacher performance in the classroom. If the needs assessment says that the teachers are insecure about their use of achievement data, I might assign to the school a professor of measurement and say that I want the teachers to participate in seminars on interpreting assessment data or evaluating achievement outcomes. Or I might assign a curriculum person because I want teachers trained better in how you use achievement data as a basis for program design and so on. The point I'm trying to make is that this process of intervention does not alter per pupil expenditure, does not add in any permanent way to the resources with which the school works, does not reduce class size, and does not add to the repertoire of services that the school has to offer. It merely sets out to help the school people see that there are ways to make better use of the resources already there.

I am happy to report that thus far I do have substantial endorsement for this approach in the city. I do have editorial endorsement from major newspapers including the TIMES and the GLOBE. Foundations have given generous grants in support of the program. The A.F.T. has said they will publicly cooperate in this design and approach to intervention.

Incidentally, the Milwakee Public Schools are also doing a school

improvement project based on my research. It is of some interest to me that they have chosen to approach it in a somewhat different way. Those of you who may have colleagues and friends in Milwaukee may want to pay some attention to the progress of their intervention since it is based on precisely the same conclusions that I have been describing.

In conclusion, this reference to schools that teach all their children what their parents want them to know when they send them to school, is not theoretical. It is a discovery as contrasted to an invention. My conclusion in that regard derives from the fact that effective schools do in fact exist and they exist right now. The second conclusion I draw is that the existence of these schools raises the question, "Why aren't they all like that?" My own answer to the question is that we happen to live in a society that values some of its people much more than it values others. Educators, like all other social servants, serve those they think they must and when they think they need not, they do not. Unfortunately, most of the children who do not get these services, happen to be members of politically impotent groups -- children who are either poor, of color, or both. But schools do exist that can solve this problem. The existence of those schools means that it is realistic to suppose that all of them could be like that. And finally, I would say that whether or not our social order ever makes education the instrument of equity of which it is capable, probably depends on how you feel about the fact that we have not done that so far.

"Effective Schools in the United Kingdom"

PETER MORTIMORE

Introduction

Secondary education in British cities faces a number of problems. A lower birthrate and migration to the suburbs means fewer children in schools, which in turn, means fewer schools with all the anxiety and insecurity for students, parents and teachers that this can cause. Social disadvantage is common: poor housing, and despite the drop in population, crowded living conditions, together with serious unemployment in some cities are compounded by an increasing proportion of single parents. The changing nature of the school population in London can be illustrated by two statistics: 40% of the children born in London are born to mothers who were themselves born outside of the United Kingdom, and a recent survey showed that one in ten of the London school students spoke a first language other than English. (ILEA 1979)

These problems are not, of course, either new or peculiar to Britain. They are similar to problems faced by city dwellers, and those responsible for organizing education in cities, in Western industrial societies, and in comparison to countries in the third world, may seem relatively trivial.

However, within Britain, social scientists have turned their attention to educational problems with increasing vigor. Research does not automatically

improve education despite the expectation that it should. John Goodlad's comments on his Study of Schooling nicely illustrates this over-expectation: "Even responsible reporters for professional media already are referring to our findings as though we and our colleagues are about to pronounce what is needed for the reform of the entire education system. Nothing could be further from our intentions and capabilities." (Goodlad et al 1979) Despite the hopes of the early pioneers of free education, schooling will not solve all our problems. As an English sociologist, Basil Bernstein, has argued: "Education cannot compensate for society." (Bernstein 1970) My personal view is, despite this, optimistic. I believe education can make a difference and I believe that research can lead to a more equitable education system.

The proper task of research is to study, as systematically as possible, the education systems and the effects of those systems upon the students who pass through them, to explain and disseminate the findings of such study and so to provide insights to practitioners...

British Studies of Schools as Social Institutions

Over the last two decades there have ... been a number of research studies of different kinds of social institutions... [T]he focus of these studies has been on the diversity that exists amongst places with similar functions... Although these studies are of different types of institutions, they show a common methodology. In each case the researchers related some form of outcome measure to the regime of the institution...

A number of studies of schools using the methodology of social institutions have been published... [Although the earlier of these studies were criticized for methodological weaknesses, these difficulties are] largely overcome in a forthcoming study of nine Welsh schools drawing students from a relatively homogenous, economically deprived, community. Using data based on measures of attainment, attendence and delinquency, the researchers found systematic variation which remained stable over time. Thus, the same schools had good attendance, adequate learning and low delinquency rates over a period of six years. In addition the researchers have been studying the regime of the schools in order to relate these outcomes to the processes of schooling. (Reynolds et al, forthcoming)

Fifteen Thousand Hours - A Study of Twelve Secondary Schools

This was the position of British research in 1975 when the field work for the Fifteen Thousand Hours study began. What was needed was a comparative study that, whilst identifying and controlling for any intake differences that might be found between the schools, would be able to examine a group of educational outcomes which, ideally, would include both concurrent and long-term measures.

If systematic differences should be found between schools, a second phase of the research would be concerned with a search for those process factors which were systematically related to the outcomes. Such a research design, based on correlations and statistical associations, would not be able to demonstrate causality, yet if the associations were

strong and the pattern of findings was clear, it was hoped that the study might illuminate the search for what makes successful schools.

The sample size of twelve schools was chosen as this number would allow comparisons to be made whilst enabling the researchers to study the institutions in depth. It was hoped to combine the detail of the earlier British case studies with the compariative design of the larger-scale surveys.

a) Outcomes

Four measures of concurrent student outcome and one long term measure were chosen. These were not seen as the only goals of schooling, but they represented areas which both parents and children see as important and which provide a good basis for many other aims. The measures were academic results, student behavior, attendance and delinquency. In addition the long term outcome was concerned with employment two years after leaving school. (Analysis of this measure is being carried out and will be reported in due course, Gray and Rutter, forthcoming)

In the results of the four outcomes that have been analyzed there were significant differences between schools. For example, although in general pupils who appeared more academically able at age ten achieved better grades in examinations at age sixteen than those who at ten appeared average or below average, there was marked variation between shcools. In some, all the pupils performed better than average; in others, all the pupils achieved less.

The exam scores were adjusted to take account of the academic differences in the intake and, in addition, differences in the occupational level of the parents. The resulting adjusted academic results for the schools showed that the school with the best academic scores had 70 percent higher grades than the expected level, whilst the school with the worst results had nearly 60 percent below it.

The other outcomes concerned with attendance, behavior and delinquency were dealt with in a similar way, so that relevent background factors could also be taken into account. Like the academic measure there were stable differences between schools in these outcomes even after allowing for initial differences in intake to the schools.

When the individual schools' performance on these outcome measures were compared, it was found that, with one or two exceptions, schools appeared to be remarkably consistent, those that had high levels of attendance and good behavior also had good academic attainment.

b) School Process

Many of the administrative and physical features of school life did not appear to be related to the outcomes, whereas factors which were concerned with the processes and quality of life of the students did. In addition, the balance of particular types of students within a school appeared to have a marked effect on the outcomes. This is a complex question involving many different statistical analyses which are discussed

in full in Fifteen Thousand Hours but briefly, it means that the academic balance of the intake was much more important than the social or ethnic mix.

The features of school life that were reflected in the process measures were:

i) Academic influence. Indicators of this were the amount of homework regularly set and marked, the display of pupil work, the teachers' expectations of pupil success and the use of library facilities.

ii) The classroom strategies of teachers. These strategies were recorded during week-long observations of classes. Broadly speaking it did appear that spending a lot of lesson time dealing with equipment was unhelpful as were too frequent disciplinary interventions and the practice of ending lessons early. In contrast, using the maximum time for teaching purposes and having a style that effectively engages the whole class was helpful.

iii) Rewards and punishments. In Britain the management of large numbers of students has traditionally involved the use of various rewards and corporal punishments. Although rewards appeared to be considerably more powerful than punishments, the latter is much more common.

iv) Conditions of school life. Various measures reflecting the conditions and facilities enjoyed by students in the schools were collected. It was found that there was a positive correlation between good conditions and the outcomes.

v) Opportunities for participation and responsibility. The schools varied considerably in the opportunities they provided for students to take on responsibility. In some schools a large number of students were given this opportunity, whilst in others it was restricted to a small group.

The findings showed the importance of a consistent approach by teachers, with schools that had a common policy on behavior or standards of work having better outcomes than those with a variety of approaches. On the question of leadership, it was found that in schools where there were more successful outcomes, there was effective leadership by senior staff and means had been found to ensure that all teachers could have their views represented.

c) School Ethos

These process measures were chosen because they had a statistically significant relationship with the outcomes. However, some may be more important than others and, indeed some may be alternatives to other better indicators of school life. For these reasons it may be helpful to view the processes as a product of school ethos. In schools where the ethos is positive - towards the students in general and towards the fostering

of effective learning by the students - positive indicators are found. In other schools, where the ethos is negative, some of the more negative indicators may similarly be found.

There are, of course, likely to be a number of ways in which a positive ethos is created and maintained in a school. The goals and expectations of the teachers, the models provided for the students, the efficiency of the feedback for both staff and students and the sensitivity of the leadership are all possible mechanisms.

Conclusions

Fifteen Thousand Hours was published over a year ago. Since then the co-authors have spoken at many meetings of teachers, educational administrators and parents, as well as at research conferences. There are many implications that can be drawn from the study. These few examples have been taken from my own discussions: educational adminstrators are faced with the problem of how to help schools to develop a positive ethos; parents may have to come to terms with the conflict due to their wish to send their child to a particular school, with the administrators need for schools to have "balanced" intakes of students; finally, teachers have to consider whether the school is, in fact, doing all it might for its students or whether, albeit unconsciously, the ethos of the school is counter productive.

These issues are challenges for administrators, parents and teachers, but my experience in Britain has indicated to me that they are being accepted with enthusiasm. The notion that individual schools can have an effect has been welcomed by teachers who had grown used to a feeling of impotence based on the idea that the overwhelming influences on young people stemmed from outside the school.

Obviously, young people are subject to a variety of influences: from personal characteristics, home background, peers, and schools. All these are important, all are likely to interact in a variety of ways. Of these influences however, only the school is easily changed. Schooling may not be able to compensate for society but it is possible that it may, for some pupils, provide a form of protection.

Likewise research may not automatically improve the quality of schooling, but without the information gained from the systematic study of consequences, intended and unintended, the close monitoring of innovatory developments, and the acquisition of new insights by practitioners schools will remain unresponsive. It is for those reasons that the research into schools must continue and develop.

"A Reporter's Journey"

ROBERT BENJAMIN

It began as a search for what are called "maverick schools: - the rare non-selective, low-income schools with long histories of high

achievement. The search went astray often. I learned there are lots of ways to look good on paper or at long distance without really doing the job. Along the way, though, I did find what I consider to be some noteworthy schools, true mavericks or not.

There was the Beasley Academic Center, right across the street from the world's largest housing project on the south side of Chicago. Just three years old, it already claims some of the highest reading achievement averages in the nation's third largest school system. Its students - predominantly low income, but selected by exam - are models of comportment. Indeed, for those who have forgotten what the public schools can be, I suggest a visit to Beasley.

On the west side of Chicago, there was the May School, the first in that city to be using a program called "Mastery Learning" at every grade level. Mastery learning is a group-based, direct instruction teaching model, based on the research of Benjamin Bloom. Mastery learning has meant rapid test score gains at May, and Chicago officials are trying to place the program in as many schools as possible.

In Houston, East St. Louis, and Eugene (Oregon), I went to schools using DISTAR, which has an impressive but controversial record with low-income children in all kinds of situations, a record largely denied by the education industry. DISTAR is highly structured, group-based, a direct instruction model. Its successes challenge many of the underlying assumptions of more traditional programs.

The last school I'd like to mention is the Garriston School, which sits in the middle of the devastated South Bronx. All Garrison's students qualify for free lunch; more than half are Hispanic; many come to school speaking no English at all. On nationally normed tests, Garrison's students hit the 50 percent mark, the kind of scores associated with schools in middle class areas.

Garrison is a non-selective neighborhood school, a pure example of maverick. Its secret is not a particular program or instructional approach, but the energy and leadership of the principal, Mrs. Carol Russo. Mrs. Russo is a good example of a kind of teacher, principal, and administrator that cropped up repeatedly during my search.

It seems that where kids are learning - particularly in the worst social circumstances - there is an adult who has decided to lay himself on the line. Leaders make schools work. Those who refuse to allow bureaucracy to encroach upon the relationship between students and their teacher. Those who will not accept excuses, who are not afraid to look for answers.

This is not to imply that the task is easy, that success can simply be mandated. Schools are not simple organizations whose elements can be manipulated at will. They sit at the center of a great number of forces, and a great number of people are party to the enterprise. Of all public endeavors, education is perhaps the most vulnerable to human and organizational failings - and perhaps the most unresponsive to public policy.

Nonetheless, the path to creating effective schools is well marked, clearly dependent on these critical factors:

The principal. Schools are street-level bureaucracies. To use an anology, the police chief can set policy as to how his officers should treat citizens, but the department's real policies are made every day by each officer as he makes decisions on the street. So with schools. Firm, district-wide policies are necessary, but they don't mean a thing unless some way is found to control what happens between teachers and students. That is the main role of school principals. They, more than anyone, determine the educational fate of their students.

But school systems seem to select, evaluate, reward, and retain principals on every basis but their key function - instructional leadership. They are expected to be mere managers, and most have settled for that.

Good principals rock the boat. They exude watchfulness, over everyone and everything within their purview. They forsake the desire to be loved for the hard task of monitoring students' progress. They set achievement goals and are willing to hold themselves and their staffs accountable.

Belief. Belief that students can learn is the foundation of true accountablitiy. It is, however, a rare attitude in many public schools. As Dennis Gray puts it, "The thing about 'All children can learn' is that it turns out to be one of those truisms that a lot of people don't believe - a lot of teachers, even a lot of parents."

Instead of assuming that kids can learn and searching for the most effective ways to teach them, many educators appear to act like consulting physicians brought in to advise dispassionately on a difficult, perhaps hopeless case. "Image management" has replaced results. As one Cincinnati principal put it, "About 10 years ago, we gave up worrying about what we did with kids and started concentrating on what we say we do."

Beliefs, in a society with a long history of racism and classism, are hard to alter. But I believe a first tenet of education is, "What you expect, you get." And so I agree with Ronald Edmonds when he suggests that the first step to reforming schools is to repudiate the deep-seated notion that certain children can't be expected to learn as well as others.

Instruction. In all the debate over problems afflicting the public schools, instruction - what happens when the teacher closes the classroom door - is seldom in the forefront. But at every school, the quality of instruction is what makes the most difference.

Student achievement results from time spent directly and efficiently on teaching academic skills in a highly structured, teacher-controlled environment. What works is increasing students' "academic engaged time." A strong academic focus works. Systematic phonics work. So do direct instruction techniques. So does restoring the primary

responsibility for students' achievement to their regular classroom teachers.

None of this represents the unraveling of a great mystery. It is available to any layman with time and inclination to pursue the question. At the same time, it has been largely ignored by many educators, by a profession (in the words of John Goodlad) "relatively weak...badly divided within itself and not yet embodying the core of professional values and knowledge required to resist fads, special interest groups, and - perhaps most serious of all - funding influences."

Teachers. Every school system in the country is faced with the problem of ill-trained teachers. Horror stories abound, and some are not just hollow tales. There are two culprits here. One is the rapidly declining status of teaching. Compounding this is the caliber of training offered at schools of education. Many are still promoting "open" education theories from the 1960's; few are adequately exposing their students to the realities of urban public school classrooms.

The alternatives are many. Stricter accountablitiy measures are a beginning. Instituting a new system of rewards is another possiblity. There is the little-used alternative of firing teachers. So few teachers are fired each year not because union lawyers are so good, but because instructional responsibilities are not well defined, standards are set abysmally low, and principals are not encouraged to tackle the issue. It comes right back to the issue of making principals take responsibility for the instruction at their schools.

Resources. Perhaps the favorite excuse of educators is that the job can't be done without the funds. Certainly the public schools in many urban areas are underfunded. However, this is nothing more than a red herring when it comes to explaining the success or failure of schools.

What counts is not how much schools have, but what they do with what they have. Small classes, high teacher salaries, new buildings or good equipment don't necessarily mean that students will receive an education, although these things may be desirable in themselves. Time and people are the only true resources schools possess. To the extent that school-level leadership mobilizes and focuses these resources on firm instructional goals, achievement follows.

Tom Tomlinson of the National Institute of Education put it well: "There's no magic answer. There's only good teaching and hard work. If kids' abilities are low, then you have to work harder, use time more efficiently. Schools that insist that kids do that - the ones that let teachers teach - produce better outcomes. Typically, schools are so badly managed as to not allow children to learn. They squander people and time."

V. SUMMARY OF THE CONFERENCE ON URBAN SCHOOLS

Urban public schools are deeply troubled. However, the research generated by the Effective School Movement and the pilot programs of inner-city School Improvement Projects, strongly suggest that it is possible to improve the effectiveness of urban schools. Still, the Council for Basic Education is distressed by an unnecessary hopelessness about urban school improvement among educators, citizens and policymakers. All children can learn, regardless of family background. There are effective urban schools, schools that promote learning for all children. Many more can be effective.

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The COUNCIL FOR BASIC EDUCATION is a non-profit educational organization dedicated to good teaching and sound learning of the basic subjects in American schools. The Council was formed in 1956 by a group of scholars, professionals, scientists, and journalists who had long urged an increased emphasis in the public schools on the fundamental academic disciplines. With over 7,000 members nationwide, CBE sponsors a program of publications, information services, conferences, school visits, and liaisons with educational and other groups.

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